

Hon. Monte McNaughton
Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development
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May 5, 2021

Open Letter: Paid Sick Days for Ontario Workers

Dear Minister McNaughton,

We are writing to bring to your attention our urgent concerns regarding the safety of Ontario workers during the pandemic. Your government's recent announcement of the Ontario COVID-19 Worker Income Protection Benefit is a step in the right direction, but it is not enough.

OCASI is the umbrella organization for the immigrant and refugee-serving sector in Ontario with 240 member agencies across the province. Our member agencies provide a broad range of services to immigrants and refugees in Ontario, and are on the frontlines of supporting these individuals and communities to weather the pandemic by providing essential information and support.

The elevated infection rates in Ontario, particularly of the more concerning variants of COVID-19, and increased rates among younger adults are serious cause for concern for all Ontarians. Study after study has shown that women and the working poor – particularly racialized and im/migrant workers are disproportionately impacted.

In January 2021 we learned from a Peel Region Health report that one in four COVID-positive residents went to work while sick with COVID symptoms. This is not surprising as low-waged gig workers in particular who live from paycheck to paycheck have little choice but to go to work even when sick, at risk to themselves, their families, coworkers and the community at large. We are deeply alarmed at the disproportionate impact on racialized and immigrant communities, particularly communities in Brampton and certain other communities in Peel Region. Members of racialized and immigrant communities are over-represented among those working on the frontlines in essential sectors, and they are overwhelmed by the spread of infection, illness and death. They also face additional impacts on health and mental health, and longer term social and economic consequences – which can be massively detrimental for communities that are already contending with systemic barriers and disadvantages including racism and discrimination.

An adequate number of paid sick days would allow affected workers to stay home to take care of themselves, as well as reduce the risk of spreading infection. We are deeply disappointed

that the Ontario COVID-19 Worker Income Protection Benefit will provide only three paid sick days, and is a temporary measure that will end in September.

The improved rollout of vaccines in the affected communities in Brampton and elsewhere is encouraging and we hope will improve protection for all residents, but this must be combined with sufficient paid sick days for workers to be truly effective. The Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table has said that the federal Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB) is not adequate, and places the burden on workers to apply for the payments which are not sufficient or timely. The Science Table has recommended paid sick days for a maximum of two work weeks in its [April 28, 2021 Brief](#).

As the Minister now responsible for immigration and settlement, we hope refugee and immigrant communities in Ontario can count on you to ensure the safety and well-being of those entrusted to your Ministerial care. **We urge you to immediately increase the number of paid sick days from three to at least two weeks as recommended by the Science Advisory Table, and make this a permanent provision for all Ontario workers.** Your government has recognized that essential workers and immigrants in particular, are critical to Ontario's economy. Their economic potential can be realized only if workers receive the support and protection they need now and in the future to protect their health and well-being.

OCASI welcomes your leadership on the immigration file for Ontario, and welcomes any opportunity to assist your government in working towards the best outcomes for immigrants and refugees in Ontario. The Council looks forward to an opportunity to further discuss our concerns.

Yours truly,



Debbie Douglas
Executive Director

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